DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 192 206 CG 014 662

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TITLE Childless Males and Their Childbearing Attitudes.
PUB DATE 80
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Southwestern Psychological Association (26th, Oklahoma City, OK, April 10-12, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Rearing; Children; Consumer Economics; *Family Planning; Individual Differences; *Males; *Parent Attitudes; Personality Traits; *Population Trends
IDENTIFIERS *Firo B Scale; *Nowicki Duke Locus of Control Scale

ABSTRACT

Heretofore, researchers have perceived women as the ones concerned with having children, generally excluding males from their samples. In order to look at male attitudes on childbearing, an investigation was conducted on personality differences between childless males preferring children within five years of marriage and those preferring to delay childbearing for a longer period of time. A pilot study questionnaire located childless males and divided them into two groups of 25 subjects each with respect to preferred childbearing following anticipated or present marriage. Subjects completed the Firo-B, the Nowicki-Duke Internal-External Locus of Control Scale, and a demographic-attitude questionnaire. A significant difference was found, indicating that males preferring to delay childbearing wanted fewer children than those preferring children more immediately. Quantitatively measured attitudes on childbearing were not found to differentiate males of childbearing preferences. Males were found to have realistic attitudes with respect to childbearing and were enthusiastic subjects who discussed why they preferred children, reasons why persons might not want children, and issues of concern directly related to their own plans for childbearing. (Author/NRB)

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ED192206

CHILDLESS MALES AND THEIR CHILDBEARING ATTITUDES*

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CG 014662

*This research was conducted in the Spring of 1979 at Oklahoma State University. It is part of ongoing research dealing with childbirth attitudes and preferences of males.

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INTRODUCTION

Current concern over world population figures has increased both academic and popular interest in fertility rates, patterns, and plans. Terms such as planned parenthood, adoption, and voluntary and involuntary childlessness, have become quite common, signifying an era in which birth planning has become respectable and expected. Individuals today perceive themselves as having a number of options in planning a family - including the options of remaining childless, having fewer children, delaying childbearing, etc. Many of these options have become available to the general society only recently. In spite of these changes and trends, research literature contains few definitive studies investigating factors which differentiate couples or individuals on when and how they choose to make childbearing decisions (Gough,1973). The studies that do exist have concentrated heavily on female subjects or, more recently, on couple interaction with little concern for individual male attitudes (Hass, 1974).

Past researchers have tended to perceive women as being the ones concerned with having children, largely excluding males from their samples. Males have been relegated the role of "passive participant" in the childbearing decision making process. Card (1978), however, recognizes males as

having an active interest with respect to childbearing issues. The present research attempts to further explicate the attitudes of males on childbearing, as well as expand on the notion that males are viable subjects in population and family planning studies.

It is necessary, before engaging the task of studying procreation preferences, to view briefly some of the studies which have attempted to find variables which affect such preferences. Past studies (Kiser and Whelpton, 1958; Westoff, Potter, and Sagi, 1963; Westoff and Westoff, 1971) indicate that few variables differentiate people with respect to childbearing preferences because trends are such that the U.S. population generally prefers a similar number of children. With the slight variance there is, Bottenelli (1975) found that the attitudinal variables of couples accounted for more of the variance than did demographic variables such as education, income level, religious preference, and ethnicity. Attitudes include ideas of desiring to continue the family name, having as many children as one can afford, creative expression, need for adult identity, etc. Slosnerick (1975), again working with couples, found that whether or not persons felt in control of their fate differentiated desires for more or fewer children.

The problem addressed with the present research was to determine whether an Internal-External Locus of Control Scale and the Fundamental Interpersonal Relation Orientation

Behavior (FIRO-B) instrument, which quantitatively measure attitudes, can differentiate the childbearing preferences of adult males. A second issue involved an attempt to determine the kind and degree of interest individual males have, on the topic of childbearing preferences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A pilot study was initially conducted, whereby all the students in several undergraduate and graduate psychology courses at a medium size, Midwestern university were asked to fill out a short questionnaire. The questionnaire was principally used to locate childless males who were willing to volunteer time as research subjects. Additional data gathered allowed the males from this population to be divided into two groups with respect to preferred childbearing following the date of anticipated or present marriage.

Because nearly all of the approximately 200 males volunteered as potential subjects, twenty-five males were randomly selected from the 200, for each of two groups. Group I consisted of twenty-five males who stated a preference for prolonging their childless status after marriage, for a period longer than five years. Group II

consisted of twenty-five males who preferred to have children within the first five years of their marriage. The decision to divide the groups along these lines was suggested by the work of Veevers (1973). Responses in her research indicated that although individuals felt no pressure to have children during the first year of marriage, social pressure to have children increased during the next few years and was heaviest during the third and fourth years. This pressure then diminished after the fifth year and remained about the same from then on. In the original population of the present study, there were no males who stated a preference for children in the first year and only four who stated a preference to remain childless.

All fifty males who participated in the study were enrolled full time in university courses. All males were Caucasion, American citizens between the ages of twenty and thirty; had no children and, if married, had a wife that was not pregnant. Each subject was administered the FIRO-B, the Nowicki-Duke Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (ANS-IE) (Nowicki and Duke, 1974), and a demographic-attitude questionnaire. The FIRO-B was used to determine attitudes on interpersonal affiliation, responsibility, and emotional involvement (Schutz, 1958). The ANS-IE was used to determine intrapersonal attitudes towards the determinants of one's fate. The demographic-attitude questionnaire included questions on age, religion, student status, academic major, and number of siblings in subject's family

of origin. Other factors included were marital status and years married; desire for or against having children; total number of children expected and when; total number desired and when; and reasons for stated preferences. Finally, subjects were given an opportunity to respond with any comments they chose, concerning aspects of childbearing. T-tests were used to determine if the groups were different as measured by the attitude scales. Attitudes volunteered by the subjects, on the questionnaire, were categorized and surveyed for similarities.

RESULTS

Quantitative measures used to assess intra- and interpersonal attitudes were unable to differentiate males with respect to their temporal preferences related to childbearing. Scores on the FIRO-B and ANS-IE were analyzed by means of one-tailed t tests ($a=.05$) and no significant differences were found. Group I males were not found to have more or less affiliative, responsible, or affectionate attitudes than Group II males. On personal attitudes of whether a subject felt he was the determiner of his fate, there was a trend in the data ($t=1.949, df=48, p<.057$) which indicates that Group I males tend to be those individuals

who feel their lives are more controlled by external forces than internal ones.

One result gathered from the demographic data, which was quite significant, is that Group I males preferred fewer children than did Group II males ($t=3.83$, $df=48$, $p<.01$). Males who wanted to initiate childbearing after five years preferred a mean of 1.68 children whereas those males wanting children within the first five years of marriage wanted 2.56. It is also interesting to note that none of the Group I males preferred more than two children. Other demographic characteristics of the two groups of males were compared with the use of Chi-square tests. No differences existed between the two groups on measures of religious preference, community size and urban or rural background, age, or socio-economic status.

From surveying the written responses on subjective attitudes, it was found that males have many ideas and feelings with regard to childbearing issues. A formal breakdown of these responses is presented in the discussion section.

DISCUSSION

A non-quantitative but significant finding of the study

was the degree of interest and integrated thinking males have with respect to childbearing issues. Males were found to be as likely to volunteer as subjects for research involving attitudes on childbearing as were females. They verified their interest by not only spending a great deal of time and energy writing responses to open ended questions regarding their attitudes on childbearing, but by voluntarily staying after the research period and dialoguing about their views of childbearing and childrearing.

Subjects were given an opportunity to respond with any comments they chose, concerning aspects of childbearing. Their responses tended to fall into three categories - why they preferred children, reasons why persons might prefer not to have children, and issues of concern directly related to their own plans for childbearing.

The reasons these males want to have children can be classified in general, under several headings. The idea expressed most often was that of a like for children followed closely by the idea that children provide a positive experience or challenge in life. Several responses might be seen falling under a rather egocentric or narcississtic label such as - children will provide me satisfaction, (for example in old age), give me a degree of immortality, and give me someone to interact with as well as carry on family traditions. A final category seems to capture the idea that men have children because that is what happens in marriage, it is instinctual, or that is what

happened in families of origin. From such answers it is possible to get a feeling that children do indeed have expectations placed on them to be associates to their parents and the carriers of tradition into the future.

Another general response category involved reasons why childlessness might be preferred to having children. Two major themes can be noted in these responses, the first being that children create many difficulties in the areas of finances, emotional drain, and career decisions. The second is that because of the degree of responsibility necessary in childraising, they are often a bother and inconvenience, stifling the freedom to pursue what Veevers (1972) has called an adult oriented life style. A small number of responses also included such ideas as people not having children because they disliked children, because they could not, for biological or psychological reasons, because they felt a need to lower the world population, and finally, because some people are just too selfish. From these responses one might conjecture that young adult males are aware of costs to having children and might cognitively empathize with those individuals choosing to delay or forego childbearing. There appears to be little awareness, however, of biological and psychological reasons for remaining childless and from this we might expect childless individuals to feel somewhat stigmatized around this group of males.

In support of the hypothesis that males are sensitive

to the costs of childbearing and its concomitant decision making demands, the third category of responses showed males to be concerned, in the decision making, with issues of controlled population growth and financial costs. Other topics discussed included value in delaying childbearing to allow for marriage stability, time alone with the spouse, and opportunity for stabilization in career goals. Several males admitted to feelings of fear in assuming childraising responsibilities. Others mentioned the necessity of carefully planning for the task of childrearing. For the most part, however, the males appeared to perceive themselves as capable future fathers. One male encapsulated this general feeling by stating - " I don't mean to sound egotistical but I just think I would make one helluva father."

The finding that measured attitudinal variables do not differentiate childbearing preferences is perhaps partial support of Rossi's (1970) theory that childbearing preferences correlate with external environmental factors rather than personality variables. From the volunteered responses of the present male sample, we might speculate that social perceptual skills might govern childbearing rather than the attitudes measured in this study. This may implicate a trend whereby males assuming themselves the masters of their fate (Group II) are willing to defy societal norms and have more than the traditional two child family. Group I males who are sensitive to external stimuli

may prefer fewer children in order to respond to population control pressures found in some present day circles. More work needs to be done in order to assess whether inter- and intrapersonal personality variables and attitudes influence childbearing preferences and what the consequences of them might be. At present, Pohlman's (1970) suggestion that the search for personality variables as they relate to childbearing preferences is not over, is validated.

Considering the hypothesis that delayed childbearing correlates with decreased numbers of children in some families, further research is in order to discover what factors, including personality variables, influence delayed childbearing. Perhaps advantages and disadvantages can be noted as they relate to delayed and thus fewer births, and from this, recommendations made with respect to ways in which behaviorally, persons can be helped to make their preferred choices.

A final recommendation is once again made referring to the value of continued research with males and their child preferences. Much data has been accumulated on females and women are without doubt, very influential in terms of the childbearing decision. The present research suggests that males, too, can be very involved in decisions and have their own views and opinions concerning childbearing. Male decision making in this area also fits into the values of a more female-liberated society which recognizes that as both men and women become more involved in all facets of home

life, they will also become more active in support of an egalitarian society.

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